



# Chronic Diseases and COVID-19

# STAYING HEALTHY



**If you have a chronic disease, you are more likely to experience serious complications if you get COVID-19.**

COVID-19 has further revealed the historical and current inequities in our society. Structural racism plays a role in people of color being at a higher risk for chronic diseases, and that increases their risk for serious complications from COVID-19.

In addition to taking steps to protect yourself from COVID-19, one of the most important things you can do if you have a chronic disease – especially if you are 65 or older or have a disability – is to take good care of your health. You can also use this information to help take care of your family, friends, and community.

## If you have...

### Diabetes

Monitor blood sugar regularly and keep taking all medications following your provider's instructions. Keeping blood sugar in control can lower risk of complications from COVID-19. If you are having trouble paying for your diabetes medications, [ADA can help](#).

### Asthma

COVID-19 harms the lungs, so it's important to manage triggers, use your controller and rescue medications, and follow your asthma action plan (if you have one). Since many household cleaning products can make your asthma worse, try to clean and disinfect your home following [CDC guidelines](#).

### Heart Disease

Keep taking your heart medications following your provider's instructions. Lowering your stress level can also help keep your heart healthy. Try deep breathing, get 6-8 hours of sleep, try to eat a healthy diet, and exercise when you can.

### Cancer

Cancer and cancer treatments can weaken the immune system which makes it harder to fight COVID-19. It is especially important for you to avoid unnecessary contact with others, so talk to your provider about having oral medications shipped to you, to avoid a trip to your provider's office or the pharmacy.

### High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure increases risk for complications from COVID-19. Monitor your blood pressure at home and keep taking all medications following your provider's instructions.

### Nicotine Addiction

People who smoke or vape risk the possibility of getting sick with COVID-19. Smoking and vaping cause inflammation and stress your immune system; also cigarettes and vapes move from your hand to your mouth. Wash your hands as much as possible, and reduce trips to the store.

## If you have any chronic disease, take these healthy steps:



**Talk to your provider about the safest way to schedule your healthcare appointment.**

Ask for an **extra supply of medication** in case you can't get to the pharmacy. Keep taking your medication following your provider's instructions.

Ask if you need any **vaccinations**, such as the flu and pneumonia.



**Focus on healthy eating and regular exercise to control stress and stay healthy.**

**Eat healthy foods when you can**, like fruits, vegetables and lean proteins.

**Find ways to exercise safely at home.** If you go outside, follow social distancing guidelines and wear a mask or cloth face cover.

**Control stress.** Take breaks from the news, try deep breathing exercises, or do an activity that you enjoy.



**Quit smoking and/or vaping, even if you have tried quitting before.**

Smoking and vaping can harm the lungs and increase the risk of complications from COVID-19. Free coaching support and medications are available:

**Call: 1-800-QUIT-NOW**

**Visit: [KeepTryingMA.org](https://www.KeepTryingMA.org)**

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## Protect Yourself from COVID-19:

- When you can, stay at home. Only leave when you need to, like to work an essential job, go to the grocery store or pharmacy, or in a medical emergency.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from other people when you are outside of your home.
- Wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds each time with soap and water.
- When you are in a place where it is hard to keep 6 feet away from other people, wear a mask or cloth face cover.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that you touch a lot, like cell phones, door knobs, faucets and counters.

**Check to see if you have symptoms of COVID-19**



**Don't hesitate to call 911 in an emergency** – especially if you think you could be having a heart attack, are experiencing **any** sign of stroke, if you've been a victim of sexual assault or any kind of violence, or have another type of injury.

Even during COVID-19, 911 is still the fastest way to get care and possibly, save a life. EMS and hospitals in Massachusetts are taking steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- ✓ **Call 911 if you experience any sign of stroke:** Face drooping, arm weakness, or speech difficulty.
- ✓ **Call 911 if you think you may be having a heart attack:** Chest pain, chest heaviness, significant shortness of breath, cold sweats, sometimes paired with nausea or light-headedness.
- ✓ **Call 911 or SafeLink (877-785-2020) if you've been a victim of sexual assault** or any kind of violence.

# Prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

Accessible version: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have COVID-19, follow the steps below to care for yourself and to help protect other people in your home and community.

## Stay home except to get medical care.

- **Stay home.** Most people with COVID-19 have mild illness and are able to recover at home without medical care. Do not leave your home, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Take care of yourself.** Get rest and stay hydrated. Take over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen, to help you feel better.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor.** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you have trouble breathing, or have any other emergency warning signs, or if you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.**



## Separate yourself from other people and pets in your home.

- **As much as possible, stay in a specific room** and away from other people and pets in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available. If you need to be around other people or animals in or outside of the home, wear a mask.
- See **COVID-19 and Animals if you have questions about pets**: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#COVID19animals>.
- Additional guidance is available for those **living in close quarters**. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/living-in-close-quarters.html>) and **shared housing** (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/shared-housing/index.html>).



## Monitor your symptoms.

- **Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath but other symptoms may be present as well.**
- **Follow care instructions from your healthcare provider and local health department.** Your local health authorities will give instructions on checking your symptoms and reporting information.



## When to Seek Emergency Medical Attention

Look for **emergency warning signs\*** for COVID-19. If someone is showing any of these signs, **seek emergency medical care immediately**:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Bluish lips or face
- Inability to wake or stay awake

\*This list is not all possible symptoms. Please call your medical provider for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you.

## Call 911 or call ahead to your local emergency facility:

Notify the operator that you are seeking care for someone who has or may have COVID-19.

## Call ahead before visiting your doctor.

- **Call ahead.** Many medical visits for routine care are being postponed or done by phone or telemedicine.
- **If you have a medical appointment that cannot be postponed, call your doctor's office**, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19.



## If you are sick, wear a mask over your nose and mouth.

- **You should wear a mask over your nose and mouth** if you must be around other people or animals, including pets (even at home).
- You don't need to wear the mask if you are alone. If you can't put on a mask (because of trouble breathing for example), cover your coughs and sneezes in some other way. Try to stay at least 6 feet away from other people. This will help protect the people around you.
- Masks should not be placed on young children under age 2 years, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is not able to remove the mask without help.



**Note:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, medical grade facemasks are reserved for healthcare workers and some first responders. You may need to make a mask using a scarf or bandana.



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

## Cover your coughs and sneezes.

- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Throw used tissues** in a lined trash can.
- **Immediately wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



## Clean your hands often.

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.
- **Use hand sanitizer** if soap and water are not available. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water are the best option**, especially if your hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching** your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.



## Avoid sharing personal household items.

- **Do not share** dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.
- **Wash these items thoroughly after using them** with soap and water or put them in the dishwasher.



## Clean all "high-touch" surfaces everyday.

- **Clean and disinfect** high-touch surfaces in your "sick room" and bathroom. Let someone else clean and disinfect surfaces in common areas, but not your bedroom and bathroom.
- **If a caregiver or other person needs to clean and disinfect** a sick person's bedroom or bathroom, they should do so on an as-needed basis. The caregiver/other person should wear a mask and wait as long as possible after the sick person has used the bathroom.



High-touch surfaces include phones, remote controls, counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables.

- **Clean and disinfect areas that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them.**
- **Use household cleaners and disinfectants.** Clean the area or item with soap and water or another detergent if it is dirty. Then use a household disinfectant.
  - Be sure to follow the instructions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of the product. Many products recommend keeping the surface wet for several minutes to ensure germs are killed. Many also recommend precautions such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.
  - Most EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.

## When You Can be Around Others After You Had or Likely Had COVID-19

When you can be around others (end home isolation) depends on different factors for different situations.



- **I think or know I had COVID-19, and I had symptoms**
  - You can be with others after
    - 24 hours with no fever**AND**
    - Symptoms improved**AND**
    - 10 days since symptoms first appeared
  - Depending on your healthcare provider's advice and availability of testing, you might get tested to see if you still have COVID-19. If you will be tested, you can be around others when you have no fever, symptoms have improved, and you receive two negative test results in a row, at least 24 hours apart.
- **I tested positive for COVID-19 but had no symptoms**
  - If you continue to have no symptoms, you can be with others after:
    - 10 days have passed since test
  - Depending on your healthcare provider's advice and availability of testing, you might get tested to see if you still have COVID-19. If you will be tested, you can be around others after you receive two negative test results in a row, at least 24 hours apart.
  - If you develop symptoms after testing positive, follow the guidance above for "I think or know I had COVID, and I had symptoms."